

Producers' Perspective: Increasing Access to Local Food

Facilitator: Krysia Woroniecka, Tilia Market Garden/Kids Kitchen

Panel:

- Clive Williamson, Maynard House
- Glenn Buckingham, Helmingham Hall Estates, NFU
- Marley Karazimba, ELIAS Permaculture/Bantu Farm
- Ryan Boyd, The Oak Tree Community Farm
- Samuel Morgan, Stour Valley Farming and Conservation

Krysia opened the session by sharing that she is a market gardener who also runs workshops for children and families. They make lunch, it's accessible, it's plant rich and it's fun, and it brings together producers and families. Until this year she worked as a food systems campaigner for Feedback, who put food waste on the policy agenda. She is joined today at the Summit by 5 producers working at varying scales and exemplifying everything we are talking about when it comes to local food.

Krysia firstly discussed the state of the UK food system and why the local system is a solution. The [House of Lords enquiry report](#) highlighted that two thirds of people in the UK are overweight, 1/3 are obese and Type 2 Diabetes is on the rise. Much of this is due to over exposure to processed food a global food system that is run by retailers and manufacturers marketing food that is high in salt and sugar that is at the expense of human health, environment and farmer livelihoods.

Coupled with the above farmers in the UK are paid very little and are at mercy of a globalised fossil-fueled food system. At the same time farmers are facing the removal of direct payments and we are yet to see if the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) will be enough to keep farmers in business. And so, the globalized food system is responsible for health problems, contracting farmer livelihoods, and is also the single largest emitter of greenhouse gas emissions.

But, it's not all bleak! We have the introduction of the Suffolk Food Partnership which is a huge reason for celebration and is a first step in joining up and strengthening what is already a strong local food system in Suffolk.

When we refer to local food we mean shorter supply chains and farmer focused with a diversity of suppliers and scales, as opposed to retailer and manufacturer focused.

Benefits of local food:

- Economics: Shorter supply chains mean that farmers get more of the food pound (revenue) which is then retained locally and reinvested locally. Also locally produced food tends to be more associated with agroecological farming which has a much higher job rate than retailers or conventional farming.

- Health and social benefits: Eating locally does change people's eating habits and box schemes mean that people do eat more vegetables. There is improved general health and an increased sense of community.
- Nature and climate: greater proportion of suppliers who are using agroecological methods such as reducing reliance on heated greenhouses. There is also less food waste driven by supermarkets overproduction and overconsumption.

Taken from Sustain's [Case for Local Food Report](#)

Marley Karazimba, Farmer, ELIAS Permaculture/Bantu Farm

Marley explained he is a tenant farmer on 3 acres in Bentley and the model is community supported agriculture (CSA). His members are all within a 5 mile radius of the farm. He runs a surplus share scheme, where any surplus goes to restaurants, artisan bakeries. There's no waste as he always find a home for the produce.

Clive Williamson, Fruit Farmer, Maynard House

Clive is a third generation fruit farmer in Bury St Edmunds. His grandfather started farming in Essex and grew in size and had multiple farms, but nowadays they are heading in the opposite direction as costs increase and slowly there are less and less acres and just one farm now. More recently he has been pushed out of supermarkets because there are too small a farm, although they grow 100 tonnes of strawberries, supermarkets want 1,000 tonnes of strawberries. Clive now grows strawberries for the local market and is back in to more traditional methods of distribution through local wholesale and shops. He also produces apple juice under the brand of Maynard House, which is distributed across the South East, and sold directly from farm to consumer with short supply chains. This proves for them to be a better strategy than using the long supply chains through supermarkets with small returns.

Glenn Buckingham, Farm Manager, County Chair NFU, Helmingham Hall Estates

Glenn is the County Chair for the National Farmers Union and farm manager for Helmingham Hall Estates. He was classically trained in general agriculture 40 years ago. Glenn grows crops that end up in the big food chain, for example feed wheat and malting barley. Also peas more recently for human consumption, if they make the grade. The big corporates that own the connection of food are very picky about the quality. Glenn asked everyone to sign up the petition for the farm tax. If the government do this it will be the beginning of the end of small family farms, which are the infrastructure we need in order to have a local food system: [Don't change inheritance tax relief for working farms - Petitions](#)

Ryan Boyd, Head Grower, The Oak Tree, Community Farm

Ryan is the head grower at Oak Tree community farm based just outside of Ipswich. This farm is also a CSA and started in 2011. It's a very busy farm with a huge amount of engagement from members that pay for the veg boxes. There are 4 acres and have 110 members of the CSA and they produce boxes every week of the year, except Christmas. They grow a huge variety of crops, around 30-40 crops including trees, fruit bushes and all the vegetables.

Samuel Morgan, Tenant Farmer, Stour Valley Farming and Conservation

Sam runs Stour Valley Farming and Conversation on 90 acres south of Sudbury where he produces beef and grass. He's a first generation tenant farmer and very new to it. Being on a flood plain meadow in terms of ecosystem services is a huge part of his farm system. Depending on how the Sustainable Farming Incentives (SFI's) and Countryside Stewardship Schemes go, it might help cover some of the costs towards it. But a lot of the reason he is doing it is because he is passionate about it, and this way of farming isn't really something which is accounted for in the current farming system. He has a very small herd of cattle. They are fed completely within a 5 mile radius of Sudbury. He wants to keep it all very local so he can tell people exactly where everything is coming from. It has been a steep learning curve! It's a difficult industry to get into, and he acknowledged how propped up he has been from other farmers locally.

Are there financial barriers to maintaining production or scaling up? What support do you all need?

Sam said starting up with livestock and buying cattle means there is a huge amount of money required. Lots of talk about poorer side of livestock farming globally, but in this part of the world livestock production, if managed well, can help towards fewer inputs and soil management. Locally he has struggled with access to abattoirs and there are not many butchers that will take on private work and he has a bottle neck where he cannot get produce out there, especially in the run up to Christmas. The Sustainable Food Trust and Pasture for Life publicises the issues around abattoirs and there is support out there. In Sudbury two abattoirs have been lost fairly close by and these businesses want consistency and throughput and for smaller scale farms this is hard to achieve.

Ryan said that smaller producers have to be very reliant on their community. Scaling up for Oak Tree would mean more engagement from the community in Ipswich and Woodbridge. It has been a very slow journey, lots of people don't understand the concept of working on the land and receiving a veg box, but attitudes are slowly changing. Farming subsidies such as ELMS aren't really out there for a farm model such as Oak Tree, being on 4 acres and producing a few thousand veg boxes a year. It's hard to put a value on that. They are doing as much as they can to build momentum locally, which seems to be working. Ryan sees hope in a cultural change and more local responsibility, but doesn't see hope in government policy.

Glenn said there are three quarters of a million people in Suffolk that need to be fed. Abattoir situation is an issue, and he uses an abattoir the other side of Norwich meaning his lambs will travel 140 miles to reach his customers. The average food mile of a product in the supermarket is 1500. 26% of UK emissions is transport, not sure how much of that is moving food around. People like eating bread and biscuits and there is not a mill in Suffolk now that can produce flour for bread - the local infrastructure is main issue.

Clive said he is fairly new to the local community idea, but his gut feeling is the customer is the key to making the change. The customer needs to move away from shopping in the supermarket and so that is where the focus needs to be.

Marley would like to do upskilling workshops, but does not have money for a composting toilet accessible for a wheelchair, or a weather proof learning space. He wants to have community groups accessing the site etc. teaching people how to do things for themselves. CAS and food partnership have been really helpful to him.

Who are your current customers and are you reaching your target customers?

Ryan said with regards to small scale veg boxes, they are in a position now where they would like to target people who can't afford it, as they do get more of a middle class demographic. There are lots of great models out there, e.g. if you know the cost of your business up front you give your customers that cost up front. E.g. if you have £50,000 of costs you go to your members and say we have to raise this amount and it's up to you to decide how much you want to pay, based on affordability – sliding scale model. This is the power of a local community. There are people who can afford to pay more.

Sam said it is paradoxical with livestock, the lower the cost of production the more valuable the product is at the end. As a producer he wants to grow his business. Where does the compromise come from? Is it the producer that accepts less for their product in order to make it more accessible to people? With farming more generally, the existence of BPS has meant that food production can continue to exist below the cost of production, but this has distorted food prices for so long. Those on the lowest incomes suffer the most. Do we move back to a government support system?

Krysia discussed cost of living crisis and the decision after the second world war to keep prices low in the face of rising living costs. There are lots of background political decisions that we cannot solve.

Clive noted that there is a huge opportunity to incentivise farmers to get together with the community to share farms. The farmers have the asset, the infrastructure and generally speaking they have the land which could be diversified in to.

Marley - CSA model means that people can volunteer instead of signing up for a veg box. Some people on low income, CSA model is good as they can volunteer and help and then leave with a veg box. This is how he got into it initially, by volunteering at his local CSA.

Glenn supplies supermarkets indirectly. The peas go to a company now owned by AGM, one of the big five grain traders globally. Barley will more than likely end up as chicken feed, which is sold to and through a big company. The wheat will probably end up as pig feed. He has given up milling wheat because of the haulage to the Midlands which is where most of the mills are. And they do grow some sugar beet now.

With regards to dynamic procurement Glenn took a group of farmers to Ipswich Hospital 10 years ago and said why can't we supply good food for your hospital meals. The hospital wanted it to be done incredibly cheaply. The kitchen at Ipswich Hospital was closed down and the food was now being delivered from Colchester Hospital and kept warm, which was cheaper than running two kitchens. Of course patient recovery would be better if food was better. Glenn

spoke of his mother-in-law's career in Leeds general infirmary 60 years ago. Her remit in the catering there was to design meals depending on the patients health requirements.

Krysia acknowledged that dynamic procurement probably deserves a panel of its own, and suggested further reading on [HOME | dynamicfood](#).

Questions from the Audience:

- Eamonn, Chair of Deben Climate Centre is setting up CSA early next year. He was at FWAG awards last week and heard talk from the Sustainable Food Trust. One of the ideas she quoted was if food vouchers were worth double if spent in a farmers market. Food voucher could be traded for a month's membership of a CSA potentially? The panel agreed that this is a great idea, especially by getting people more connected to their food system locally.
- A previous Headteacher said that you can take control of your own school kitchen. You don't have to do what county says you have to do – you can say this is my school, this is my kitchen. But the flip side is around educating children. They have this veg because they know what the veg is. His new role is coordinator of a food bank and he provides lots of fruit and veg and recipes to go with them and cooking courses being linked to giving someone an air fryer or slow cooker.
- Krysia clarified that when we are talking about increasing uptake of local food. If we replace 10 percent of supermarket retail with local produce we would be making huge difference, it is NOT all or nothing thinking. There is so much cause for optimism, already.
- Audience member said it has been announced that an estimated 49% of farmers in the UK are looking at closing their farms over the next year. How will this statistic mold UK farming in general?
The panel felt that larger farms will probably consume smaller ones initially until there is a situation where this changes.
Krysia discussed responsible land ownership and does that mean you sell off small parcels of land. Will we see changes if inheritance tax changes go ahead? Will people wanting access to land even be able to afford it?

Panel to sum up in a few words what they would like audience to take away:

- Connect with your local producers and if you are a producer connect with consumers.
- Meet your local farmer, think about why you can't find them.
- Change everything.
- Find your local CSA please.
- Need to simplify it.

Anna Beames, Chief Executive Officer, Suffolk FWAG offered a useful phrase for us all to take away: *'Make it your business to know where all your food is coming from and where all your poo is going. 90% of us can't answer either of these questions.'*